

**URN:** 21-129

**Subject:** Agile Working Policy

**Report to:** Policy & Resources Committee 27 July 2021

**Report by:** Sarah Tate, Head of Organisational Development

**SUBJECT MATTER** – This report presents the new draft Agile Working Policy.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That Policy and Recourses committee agree the new Agile Working Policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Council recognises the need to develop modern, transformative working practices, focusing on performance and outcomes, to enable the council to continue to deliver its services to the highest standards, have the ability to retain flexibility to meet business needs, to attracting and retaining staff, be able to compete for the best talent and to be an employer of choice.
- 1.2. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in staff having to very quickly adapt to new ways of working that has caused in an acceleration in implementing our IT developments and digital strategy and for the majority of staff, having to get to grips with working remotely. This has included embracing new technology, communicating with teams and colleagues in a different way, being more creative in how we deliver our services and has allowed staff to improve their work life balance with a reduction in their commute time and being able to work in a more flexible way.
- 1.3. The Council has continued to successfully deliver its services, support its communities and business, drive major projects forward and respond to the pandemic whilst working in an agile manner. Without the ability to work in this way we would not have achieved everything that we have during the pandemic and the Council wants to build on this by embracing a more agile way of working. This rapid change in a short space of time has given us an opportunity to reflect on how and where we work and to evaluate our overall approach to agile working so we don't simply revert to the way we worked previously once all restrictions have been lifted.
- 1.4. During the pandemic our democratic processes were quickly adapted to a virtual way of working to enable work to continue. As restrictions ease and face to face attendance is permitted, and required, we will ensure that our agile ways of working fully support the democratic process.
- 1.5. Whilst we recognise that not all employees are able, or want, to work in a more agile way and that it will not suit everyone, in a survey which was undertaken in July 2020, 70% of staff said

that they enjoyed working from home, felt able and more productive working from home for desk based tasks and meetings, with less interruptions, a better work life balance and flexibility of their working hours to fit in with their work and home commitments, the ability to take regular exercise, eat more healthily, and take breaks, which in turn has led to greater efficiency, productivity and outputs. They also found reduced stress and anxiety, as well as saving them time, and money, on commuting. These results were further echoed in March 2021 when a survey found that nearly 90% of staff wanted to continue to work in an agile way. Our Extended Management Team also highlighted benefits including, greater productivity, more frequent contact with staff and better use of technology.

- 1.6. A customer survey was also conducted for a period of 6 weeks to obtain our customers views and understand their experience of how they had been impacted over the last 12 months with our limited front facing delivery. The Council also asked about their views on potential changes to our face to face service delivery. The survey was conducted via telephone and online.
- 1.7. Headlines are from the survey conducted by telephone (96 participants)
  - 75% said our limited face to face service over the last year **has not** impacted their interaction with us
  - 62% said they had **not noticed** any changes to the standard of our service delivery
  - 90% said they would be **happy to arrange** a pre booked appointment in future for our face to face services
  - 45% said **they would** interact with us via our video call system
  - 59% said **they would** use our online booking facility to make appointments with us in the future (either face to face, video, telephone)
- 1.8. In developing this policy, the Council has looked at business needs, learning from other public sector organisations across the country who are also transforming the way they do business, supporting local residents and businesses, and the need to be flexible with capacity. We have also taken into consideration the staff surveys, feedback from the customer survey, input from extended management team, consulted with Unison, the Staff Engagement Group, the Join Consultative Working Group and has run drop in sessions to enable staff to feed back their views.
- 1.9. Agile working is the idea that work is an activity we do rather than a place we go. It places an emphasis on how we make use of the technology and workspace available to complete our work. It supports a culture of looking at outcomes as the measure of success.
- 1.10. By working in an agile way, we will develop a modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of a desk in a council building. The overriding ethos to agile work is that “work is what you do – not where you do it”.
- 1.11. Agile working aims to provide greater flexibility particularly in relation to the time and location employees can work, subject to the requirements of the service and individual jobs.
- 1.12. The key principles of working in a more agile way include:

- **Agile and flexible** working is based on the **business needs**
  - A **commitment** to investment in **technology**
  - Staff are **supported, motivated, engaged** and feel **part of the organisation**
  - To support and **increase opportunities** on recruitment and retention
  - **Productivity, outputs** and **performance** are increased
  - Improved **resilience** and ability to flexibly **deliver** our services
  - Reducing the running costs of the Council through **making best use of our assets**
  - Reducing our **environmental footprint**
- 1.13. Introducing agile working practices will involve developing a new work culture. It is not about doing things in the old way with some new technologies and redesigned offices – it is about new ways of working using new tools, new processes, and new approaches to management and teamwork. The Council will support managers and staff through these changes by helping to identify where changes are needed and provide to tools and knowledge to realise those changes.
- 1.14. To remain competitive in a difficult recruitment market, be an employer of choice, and to continue to deliver in the way it has since the pandemic began in 2020, the Council needs to embrace these new ways of working. This is the starting point of working in a more agile way and will be under constant review. The policy and how we work will continue to evolve over time. The last 15 months have clearly evidenced how well the Council can continue to deliver in one of the most challenging times anyone has ever faced and shown its ability to adapt and evolve overnight. The Council will continue to seek feedback from staff, managers and its customers, reviewing how the new ways of working are impacting on service delivery and staff and adapt as it continues to learn.

## **2. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1. The risks of not implementing this policy is that we revert to traditional ways of working, pre pandemic and do not remain able to deliver our services as we have been during the pandemic. Agile working has enabled us to be adaptable, flexible and responsive and has given us additional capacity which has been a consequence of introducing at-pace agile working during the pandemic. Not implementing this policy will also have a negative impact on our ability to recruit and retain good staff and be an employer of choice. We already know the positive impact agile working has had on service delivery, staff health and wellbeing and productivity and we do not want to lose this. The new policy will support and enable maximum efficiency whilst balancing working and needs of customers.
- 2.2. There will be financial implications from this policy. However, they will be balanced against the benefits and tangible savings for example travel expenses, printing costs, time and productivity.
- 2.3. The roll out of the policy will be supported by an action plan which will consider the resources required to implement along with linkages to the wider corporate strategies including the Digital Improvement Strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 2.4. The policy will be subject to regular review in response to changing service delivery needs and with the ongoing development of new technologies.

### 3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1. The new policy will build on the ways of working which have been so successful during the pandemic, it will help shape our future ways of working and enable the Council to continue to deliver to its high standard, be an employer of choice, attracting and retaining the best people for jobs and help us to remain competitive in the market place.

### 4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agile Working Policy.

Area for consideration	Comment
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	Considered
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	Considered
Existing Council Policies:	Considered
Financial Implications:	Considered
Legal Implications (including human rights)	Considered
Risk Implications:	Considered
Equality Issues/EIA:	Completed
Crime & Disorder:	N/A
Every Child Matters:	N/A



# Agile Working Policy

<b>Author</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>
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## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Policy Statement .....	3
Definition of Agile Working .....	3
How does agile working differ from flexible working? .....	3
Scope of policy .....	4
Work Styles and Flexible Working Options .....	4
Working from home.....	5
Costs/Tax Relief – Home Working .....	5
Phone reception and Wi-Fi .....	6
Insurance.....	6
Alternative locations.....	6
Considerations for working at multiple locations .....	6
Security of corporate IT equipment and personal usage of equipment and technology .....	7
Data security and information management .....	7
Staff Wellbeing.....	8
Health and safety provisions .....	8
Working Time.....	8
Absence and healthy working.....	8
Managers responsibility.....	9
Employees responsibility .....	9
About this policy .....	10
Links to other Policies/Procedures .....	10

## Introduction

The Council recognises the need to develop modern, transformative working practices, focusing on performance and outcomes, to enable the council to continue to deliver its services to the highest standards, have the ability to retain flexibility to meet business needs, to attracting and retaining staff, be able to compete for the best talent and to be an employer of choice.

This policy outlines ways in which employees can work in an agile way from varied locations on a temporary basis if and when business need permits or requires this. It provides a framework of consistent and fair practices on issues that need to be taken into account when considering agile working.

The key principles of working in a more agile way include:

- **Agile** and **flexible** working is based on the **business needs**
- A **commitment** to investment in **technology**
- Staff are **supported, motivated, engaged** and feel **part of the organisation**
- To support and **increase opportunities** on recruitment and retention

- **Productivity, outputs and performance** are increased
- Improved **resilience** and ability to flexibly **deliver** our services
- Reducing the running costs of the Council through **making best use of our assets**
- Reducing our **environmental footprint**

## Policy Statement

The Council is committed to supporting employees to operate in a fully agile working culture where it can be demonstrated that the arrangements will work effectively and efficiently, won't affect service delivery and will be of benefit to the Council.

The Council believes that it is important that employees regularly connect with the organisation, supporting colleagues and customers at our primary work locations with visible and accessible leadership.

This policy outlines what the Council expects of its staff and what it, in turn, will provide in terms of equipment, support, health and safety and security. The appendix contains a useful handbook which provides some background information on the principles of agile working and some practical guidance for managers and staff about how it works in practice.

This policy is discretionary and can be suspended or terminated by the Council at any time. However, before such a step is taken, this would be discussed with those concerned and an explanation given of the reason(s) and approach to be taken.

## Definition of Agile Working

Agile working is the idea that work is an activity we do rather than a place we go. It places an emphasis on how we make use of the technology and workspace available to complete our work. It supports a culture of looking at outcomes as the measure of success.

By working in an agile way, we will develop a modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of a desk in a council building. The overriding ethos to agile work is that "work is what you do – not where you do it".

Agile working aims to provide greater flexibility in relation to the time and location employees can work, subject to the requirements of the service and individual job roles. The principles of agile working and guidance on where and how you can work is explained in this policy and the Agile Working Handbook.

## How does agile working differ from flexible working?

Agile working incorporates flexible working practices, but its aims and scope are different. Flexible working is a work pattern that has been designed for an individual employee, usually to help that person balance work and personal commitments. Unlike agile working, requests for flexible working needs to be considered in accordance with employment legislation (the Council's [Flexible Working Policy](#)). Agile working is based on the most effective operation of working tasks, hours, work location, technology and is focused on the needs of the position, department and organisation to deliver on performance.

Whilst Agile working often benefits both the employee and the employer, the agreement to work in an agile way is driven by business needs and performance.

## Scope of policy

This policy applies to all employees. Some employees, by virtue of their job role, will have more opportunities than others to work in an agile way than others. The Council has an opportunity to enable a significant proportion of staff the ability to adapt their work environment in terms of either accessing digital solutions and/or being flexible about where and when work can be undertaken, based on business need.

It should be understood that the nature of agile working will depend upon the specific role of the employee concerned. All forms of agile working must be cost effective and not serve to increase the workloads of other members of staff. Considerations of its implementation will take into account business need and the specific requirements of its service/customers.

The ability to work in an agile way is dependent on a number of factors including but not limited to:

- the requirements of the role;
- the service which is being delivered by the employee's service area;
- the organisation as a whole;
- the facilities in place to support the particular employee;
- the welfare of the employee.

Ultimately, the final decision on whether agile working will be permitted in any given situation will rest with the Council. Its length and application will also be set by the Council.

## Work Styles and Flexible Working Options

In many cases, employees may be able to blend different agile/ flexible working options, according to the business need, the tasks in hand and their personal circumstances. This involves a move away from the idea that an individual applies for and is granted a single particular alternative workstyle that is set in stone. It is important to take a considered approach so that agile working arrangements can be planned to cover the service needs as well as promote more flexible working arrangements for employees where possible. Choosing which styles of work are appropriate will depend on:

- Analysing the business need and tasks involved in the job role, in terms of how effectively they can be done at different times and in different locations;
- The potential of the agile working choices to reduce the financial and environmental footprint;
- Any impacts on teamwork and/ or customer service that may arise;
- The preferences of the employee and being able to meet their aspirations.

It is the responsibility of Directors/Heads of Service to determine the work styles of agile working that will apply to specific posts. They will consider all necessary information to determine which work styles the post in question could fall into. Steps will be taken to provide all equipment necessary for employees to undertake their role. Full details of workstyles are defined in the handbook.

Agile working will be permitted on an ad-hoc basis, meaning it will not follow a regular pattern, will be combined with working from the Council's normal workplace and is subject to the prior approval of a line manager. Employees who undertake agile working will still be expected to work their normal core hours.

There will continue to be a requirement for staff to be present in the office and employees main work location will continue to be their contracted office location as found in their statement of main terms and conditions of employment. Employees will be required to attend the office as directed by the work style of their role, the



work task they are undertaking, for example to attend committee and other meetings, and when managers require them to. There will be a need for flexibility to ensure that there is always adequate cover to meet the needs of the service.

## Working from home

Arrangements for home working should be voluntary, mutually agreed between the manager and employee and beneficial to meeting service needs. Any agreement to home working will be on a temporary basis only and could be subject to change to meet business needs.

For some roles, the home is the most effective work location for some work tasks and should be considered as normal as working in an office environment. Staff must consider the right work setting for the task in hand and this may change from day-to-day, hour-to-hour or task-to-task. Many employees view home working as an employee benefit, but it isn't for everyone. For example, some staff may have other family members who work from home or may not have the space which would make it difficult for them to work in this way. If in doubt, the manager and staff member should discuss and agree the right approach to ensure best performance.

When employees are working from home, it is important that the home working environment is set up properly, with a workstation and appropriate chair. It is necessary for everyone to be aware of the regulations that need to be observed and how to optimise their remote workspaces ergonomically. Please refer to the Health and Safety section of the policy, for further information.

It is also important that working from home is not a degraded experience compared to working in the office. When working at home, staff should be fully contactable and able to connect to all office systems and processes. Staff must be able to attend the office when requested to do so by their manager, this may mean coming into the office part way through a day when working at home.

When working from home, caring arrangements for children and other dependents must be in place as they would have been if working in the office. Staff can be called in at short notice (on the day), to cover office duties, for example if there is sudden sickness or customer demand. There may, of course, be an occasional and exceptional circumstance such as a temporary breakdown in usual care arrangements where alternative arrangements need to be made. In this situation managers will work with staff to agree the best approach and may signpost staff to other options such as annual leave or unpaid leave if agile working is not the best solution in the circumstances.

If more structured and/or permanent caring arrangements are sought, these should be requested via the [Flexible Working Policy](#).

## Costs/Tax Relief – Home Working

No direct reimbursement for household bills will be provided. This includes, but is not limited to, internet, heating, lighting, electricity, water, landline connection etc. Government advice (<https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home>) makes clear the tax relief that employees can claim if asked to work from home by their employer or the government on a regular basis for all or part of the week. This allowance helps offset costs for utility charges. Employees are responsible for finding out if they are eligible for this tax relief and making a claim, where appropriate to do so.

Many other costs are unchanged by home working such as existing broadband, council tax, rent/mortgage and non-metered water. Tax relief is only available to claim if you have to work at home on a regular basis, either all or part of the week. Agile working does not change the contractual place of work.

## Phone reception and Wi-Fi

Employees must ensure they have an adequate mobile phone reception and an appropriate internet connection to allow them to work seamlessly from home. Employees are advised to contact their internet provider to ensure that the terms and conditions of their internet/broadband package cover provision of internet connection for business use at home and that they have the right usage/allowances in their package to enable home working. Employees who are considering working from home are required to check that no restrictions apply in mortgage or tenancy agreements.

## Insurance

The council's existing liability insurance is not limited to covering a particular place or building and there are no exclusions or limitations in cover for staff working at home or on the go. However, it is important to ensure that reasonable care and precautions have been taken to minimise accident, injury, loss or damage and before any ways of working change. The relevant health and safety policies and risk assessments should be undertaken to ensure that precautions have been satisfied. In terms of personal motor insurance, employees are reminded that if they use their private vehicle for work, they have the appropriate business level of insurance.

If employees will be undertaking any type of home working, it is advisable that they check their own household insurance as it could affect the terms of their own insurance. Some household insurance providers may charge an additional premium if homes are used for business purposes. Each insurance has its own attitude to business use at home and the council will not provide any allowance for personal household insurance.

## Alternative locations

In addition to home working and traditional office spaces, work may be able to be carried out in 'third party locations', for example: organisational partners, neighbouring authorities, shared offices, cafés, libraries etc. Staff must ensure that they adhere to all of the Council's IT policies when working from any location, a list of these can be found at the end of this policy.

External wireless hotspots such as public buildings can also be accessed providing the necessary security standards are maintained. Staff accessing the network via such external Wi-Fi hotspots signals should always use the Captive Portal Helper found on your laptop. This will assist with making the connection. Ensure you use secure websites (denoted with a https).

Be mindful of confidential data – do not leave your screen on full display and be mindful of those over your shoulder. Carefully consider if the environment you are working in is suitable to make and receive confidential calls. Once you vacate the public building ensure you disconnect from the WIFI.

## Considerations for working at multiple locations

The main issues with working on the move relate to confidentiality, security, safety and health. All staff are encouraged to carry laptops and similar devices in an inconspicuous bag to avoid drawing attention to the equipment. If you are ever the victim of crime and challenged for your equipment you should always give this up. Whatever your work style, you should never give out your home address, personal phone number or arrange to meet with customers/clients at your own home. You should also be aware that when travelling on work business, usual lone worker guidance applies. You must ensure digital calendars are up to date and appropriate access to calendar content is provided to colleagues.

Further information on lone working can be found in the relevant documents under '[Personal Safety and lone working](#)' on The Loop.

## Security of corporate IT equipment and personal usage of equipment and technology

Employees can choose to use some of their own equipment to carry out their activities whilst working from home, remotely or in the office. For example, this may be preferable if the employee already has a suitable workspace, desk and chair in their home. Personal mobile phones may be used if staff do not have a corporate mobile phone. The device should be secured with a PIN and ensure that office.com, and any other application containing corporate information, is not left permanently logged in.

If staff members wish to use their own mobile phone, a call needs to be logged with the ICT Service Desk requesting access so that the relevant licencing can be allocated, and appropriate documentation provided.

The Council will provide laptops and other IT equipment to staff who require them to undertake their job role. Personal laptops should not be used.

If employees choose to use their own equipment for council work, then their own insurance should specifically cover this. In this respect, financial reimbursement for damage or loss of personal equipment will not be provided by the Council.

In the event of ICT equipment (laptop, tablet or corporate mobile phone) being lost or stolen please report this to your line manager immediately who should then inform ICT. ICT are able to remotely block and wipe your corporate laptops to prevent data leakage, loss or network intrusion. Additionally, the Council's [Data Protection Officer](#), should be informed immediately.

## Data security and information management

Maintaining the security of the information we work with is vital and those working away from a council office are responsible for the security of the data they keep and should comply with all relevant legislation, just as if they were working in a fixed council office. Managers must agree early on with their staff as to how confidential or sensitive information will be handled when working in agile ways.

Principles:

- Confidential or sensitive conversations/work must not be carried out whilst in any public areas or where others can overhear;
- Other individuals (including family members) must not have any access to personal data either on paper or as electronic records;
- All printed or other paper records must be safely locked away when not in use;
- Confidential waste should be brought into the office and disposed of in the normal way;
- All council data stored outside of the council's network, must only be stored on council systems and/or encrypted council owned devices such as USB Memory Keys.
- Council data must not be stored on any personal devices and/or staff should not send work related emails to their personal email address;
- OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE emails that are sent externally (irrespective of who these are sent to) must be classified as such and sent in-line with council policy;
- If staff are using a laptop or other portable device, they must be aware of the additional security risks if leaving this device unattended, including locking the screen when device is unattended at home;

- If staff become aware of any loss of council data they must immediately report this to their line manager and follow the Council's [reporting procedures](#) for reporting a GDPR breach.

It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure that information is handled correctly and not used for personal benefit or gain. It is a mandatory requirement for all new staff to complete the Data Protection e-learning module and all staff are required to keep updated on good information management and security practice as required and undertake refresher training in line with the Council's requirements.

## Staff Wellbeing

Managing staff wellbeing has been brought into sharp focus during the pandemic as personal and professional pressures increased because of the virus and lockdown measures. As an employer, the council understands the effect this has had on our staff and on the organisation, there are many lessons to be learned from this as we develop new ways of working. The council is mindful that remote working has increased presenteeism and in some cases worsened staff's work life balance as it has improved it for others. The Council will continue to support its staff and managers with an ongoing focus on staff wellbeing.

## Health and safety provisions

The Council will work to ensure that all usual health and safety provisions are adhered to in all locations involved in agile working. This will include conducting risk assessments of the proposed working environments where necessary to comply with legal provisions, such as inspecting the home set-up.

If an employee's health condition or impairment is likely to be within scope of the Equality Act 2020, management will ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken to identify and implement any reasonable adjustments necessary that will assist them in carrying out their role.

The employer's duty of care is the same wherever employees are working, whether in the employer's workplace, at home, on the move or in some other working environment.

Employees' health and safety responsibilities remain the same no matter the work location. All staff must on an annual basis complete the mandatory online DSE assessment including the remote worker element. More details on this can be found in the handbook.

## Working Time

One of the benefits of agile working is that it can help support a positive work-life balance. For example, it can ease the daily commute and/or help employees manage domestic responsibilities during lunch breaks or directly before and after work. Staff should ensure that whilst working from home they do not work excessively long hours on a regular basis and should aim to work their contracted hours. More information can be found on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>

## Absence and healthy working

Alongside other initiatives to promote a healthy workplace, agile working practices can reduce absence and in particular reduce stress. A significant proportion of absence from work is due to minor ailments that make the thought of commuting and sitting in an office with colleagues not feasible but manageable if working from home – being able to work from home on these occasions can have a significant impact on sickness absence. In these instances, employees should speak with their line manager to agree if working from home is a viable

option; staff should not feel obliged to work from home if they are sick - if the staff member is not well enough to work from home then the normal sickness absence procedure will apply.

Staff should also ensure that annual leave is taken on a regular basis for their wellbeing and to ensure adequate rest.

## Managers responsibility

Managers will make arrangements to keep in regular contact with staff during a period of agile working and, specifically, to encourage them to come forward with any issues they may be having. Agile working may not work for everyone and the arrangement will be regularly reviewed and terminated if necessary.

Managers will work to agree with employees how they will monitor their performance within the period of agile working. This may include setting of key targets, holding of regular meetings and ongoing performance reviews through the 1:1 process.

Managers will also work to ensure that any period of agile working does not interfere with the career development of employees, such as them missing out on key training opportunities. It is the responsibility of managers to ensure all employees are provided fair opportunity in which to take part in these types of activity.

## Employees responsibility

Employees who are working remotely may not be as regularly observed by managers, meaning that an element of trust will need to be maintained between all parties in order for the agile working arrangement to work.

It is the responsibility of employees to make sure any agile working arrangement does not impact upon their productivity and output. If it is found that this is the case, the Council will review the effectiveness of the arrangement and further disciplinary action may be taken. Employees must also ensure that they comply with all of the Council's usual policies.

Employees must ensure that they take rest breaks during the working day in line with the Council's usual policies e.g. flexitime. This is to ensure their continued wellbeing and continued compliance with government Regulations. Again, if it is found that appropriate rest breaks are not being taken, the effectiveness of the agile working arrangement may be reviewed.

Employees working from home need to ensure a safe working environment that complies with the Council's policies on health and safety. This includes adherence to Display Screen Equipment (DSE) standards.

Employees who are working from other buildings separate to the usual workplace are expected to leave their workspace clean and tidy following use and remove all personal items. Standards of hygiene will be expected to be maintained throughout their period of working in this environment.

Agile workers need to remain fully contactable by management during their working hours and must be prepared to undertake reasonable requests as directed.

Additionally, all confidential information relating to the organisation needs to be kept secure in line with its data protection policies. If it is found that the agile working arrangement has resulted, or has the potential to result in, a data breach, the arrangement may be terminated and those responsible could face disciplinary action.

## About this policy

This policy does not form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment and may be subject to change at the discretion of management in consultation with UNISON.

This policy is discretionary and therefore the Council reserves the right to withdraw agile working at any time for a member of staff/team/service. However, before such a step is taken, this would be discussed with those concerned.

## Links to other Policies/Procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the policies listed below, including but not limited to:

- Officers Code of Conduct;
- [Flexible Working Policy](#);
- [Flexitime Policy](#);
- [Information Management Policies](#);
- [Records Management Policy](#);
- [Data Protection Policy](#);
- Email Usage Policy;
- IMT Security Policy;
- Internet Security Policy;
- [Dress Code Guidance](#);
- Mobile Device Policy for Members and Officers;
- Password and Systems Access Policy;
- Removable Media Policy;
- Taking Equipment Abroad Policy;
- [Health and Safety Policies](#);
- [Personal Safety for Lone Workers Policy](#);
- [Sickness Management Policy](#).